

**Author: St. John, Apostle and Evangelist**

Unlike most Epistles, the author is not identified in the Epistle itself (although the title is ancient). Early testimony to St. John's authorship is unanimous: Iranaeus (d. 203), Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), Tertulian (d. 222) Origen (d. d. 253).

St. John, Apostle, a Jewish fisherman called by Jesus, brother of James, son of Zebedee, Jesus' first cousin, son of Salome, Mary's sister; the Disciple whom Jesus loved (Matthew 4:21-22; Mark 1:16-20, 16:1;). James and John were called Boanerges, "sons of thunder" for their zealous disposition, seen in their desire to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan that rejected Christ (Luke 9:54). St. John was one of the three Disciples closest to Jesus (John 13:23; Mark 9:1,2; John 21:20-25). As such, he was witness to the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-51), and the Transfiguration of our Lord (Matthew 17:1-3).

St. John remained faithful to our Lord throughout His crucifixion (John 19:25-27). In addition to his three Epistles, St. John wrote the Gospel according to St. John, and recorded the vision given him by God in the Revelation of Jesus Christ before his death c. 95 A.✠ D.

Church tradition records that after the Ascension of Christ, John traveled to Asia minor, of Ephesus, taking Mary, mother of our Lord and John's adopted mother, with him. There John became Bishop of the seven Churches (see Revelation 2 & 3). John did taste the cup of Christ's suffering (Matthew 20:20-23). Tradition records that John suffered under the persecution of Domitian, but survived, was imprisoned on Patmos, finally dying at Ephesus. His Apostolic Emblem is the chalice with the viper, a traditional symbol of the challenge of the high priest of Diana at Ephesus to drink the poisoned cup. As Evangelist, John is symbolized by an eagle, marking his writing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St. John.

In the west, the Feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist, is observed on December 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Date of writing:** The Epistles of St. John are generally dated after the writing of the Gospel, but before his recording of the Revelation, circa 85 (but in any case well before 95) A.✠ D.

**Context:** St. John writes to personally witness to Jesus Christ. He does so in the context of developing heresies about Jesus. Gnosticism (from Γνωσις, Gnosis, the Greek word for "knowledge") was in the early stages of development. Gnosticism held that salvation was attained by the acquisition of secret knowledge. Gnosticism taught that matter (flesh) was bad, God (spirit) is good (dualism). Several false teachings about Jesus' divinity arose in light of this heresy, the more prominent in the time of St. John was the teaching of Cerinthius. The Cerinthians believed that the man Jesus was not the Christ until his baptism by John, where He received the Spirit of God, and that before his death the Spirit of God left Jesus. A related heresy, Docetism (from Δοκέω, "I seem"),

proposed that Jesus only “seemed” to have a body. If matter is evil, then the body must be punished. Gnostics were also ascetics, and strangely enough also quite immoral livers, since the flesh was evil and incapable of redemption. St. John counters these false teachings, and all other false Christology, with a marvelous presentation of the veracity of the Gospel writings about Jesus, and about the Christian life.

### **Luther’s Preface to the Three Epistles of St. John:**

“The first epistle of John is a genuine apostolic epistle and ought to follow right after his Gospel. For as in the Gospel he promulgates faith, so here he opposes those who boast of faith without works. He teaches in many different ways that works are not absent where faith is; and if they are absent, then faith is not genuine but is lies and darkness. He does this, however, not by harping on the law, as the epistle of James does, but by stimulating us to love even as God has loved us.

He also writes vigorously here against the Cerinthians, against the spirit of Antichrist, which was beginning even then to deny that Christ has come in the flesh, and which is today for the first time really in full sway. For although people do not now publicly deny with their lips that Christ has come in the flesh, they do deny it with their hearts, by their teaching and life. For he who would be righteous and saved by his own works and deeds is as much as denying Christ, since Christ has come in the flesh for the very purpose of making us righteous and saving us with out our works, by his blood alone.

Thus the epistle fights against both parties: against those who would live in faith without any works, and against those who would become righteous by their works. It keep us in the true middle way, that we become righteous and free from sin through faith; and then, when we are righteous, that we practice good works and love for God’s sake, freely and without seeking anything else.

The other two epistles are not doctrinal epistles but examples of love and of faith. They too have a true apostolic spirit.” (AE 35.393)

### **Read 1 John 1:1-4.**

1. Compare verses 1 and 2 with John 1:1-5, 14; and Genesis 1:1.
2. From verses 1-4, how would you describe John’s relationship with Jesus? How do the very first verses of this Epistle refute Cerinthianism and Docetism?
3. The Christian faith is a confessing faith. Saving faith is never silent (Romans 10:9). What does John confess in verse 2?
4. What is the purpose of John’s confession? (see verse 3)

5. How would John's joy be made complete?

**Read chapter 1, verses 5 – 10.**

6. What is the source of John's "message"?
7. What is the "message"? Compare with John 1:4-9, 3:19-21, 8:12, 9:5, 11:9-10, 12:35-36, 12:46. You have just discovered one of the major themes of the Gospel according to St. John. It's thematic presence in the Epistle bespeaks his authorship.
8. Man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works. But by works one can know a man (Matthew 7:15-20). Apply St. John's teaching in verses 6 and 7 to situations you are familiar with.
9. Verse 7 is a good verse to reference when discussing close Communion. Why? (Hint: The Greek word κοινωνία (koinonia, fellowship) is a reference to Communion fellowship. See Acts 2:42, and reference our study on Confession and Communion.
10. From where do you know verses 8 and 9? Who is "he"? How is His forgiveness given?
11. What does verse 10 say to those who have no desire to attend the Divine Service?

**Read chapter 2, verses 1-6.**

12. How does John address his readers? How might this support the dating of the Epistle late in John's life?
13. Read Romans 6:1-14. Compare what St. Paul writes to 1 John 2:1,2.
14. The Greek word used in verse 1 is παράκλητον, "paraclete." This word occurs only in John's writings. See John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7. What word would you use to describe "paraclete"?
15. Read John 17:13-26, the "High Priestly Prayer." How is Jesus our paraclete?

16. In verse 1 St. John says he writes for a purpose. What is it? Can you connect this purpose with the main thought of verses 5-10?
  
17. If we do sin, is our salvation lost? (hint: finish verse 1)
  
18. Verse 2 uses a special word for Jesus. It is related to the word translated “mercy seat” in Hebrews 9:5 and in Romans 3:25. Check these verses. What does St. John’s use of this special word teach you about Jesus?
  
19. Did Jesus die only for those who would come to faith in Him? (hint: finish verse 2)
  
20. Does God anywhere tell us to judge? Read Matthew 7:15-20. This is also a theme in 1 John – read 2:3, 4:1. What does St. Paul direct the Christian to do in Romans 16:17-18? How can this be reconciled with Matthew 7:1?
  
21. In 2:3-6, St. John teaches of sanctification, the Christian life. How are works and faith related? Read Ephesians 2:8-10.
  
22. Read 1 John 2:7-17. What is the relationship of verses 7-11 and verse 6?
  
23. Because of their repetitive structure, verses 12-14 are set as poetry in many versions. What is the relationship between this section and verse 6?
  
24. You have heard Pastor preach many times that the Christian is not comfortable in the world. Read 1 John 2:15-17. Compare this to Romans 12:1-2, and 1 Corinthians 1:18-24. Consider this in light of Hebrews 11.

**Read 1 John 2:18-27**

25. 18-23: The Antichrist – See 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10, 1 John 4:1-3, 2 John 1:7, 1 Timothy 5:20-21. Note that John refers to both antichrist and antichrists. The antichrist must claim a position in the church, indeed to be a church leader. Note some of the attributes of the antichrists John writes about in the space below. Revelation 13:1-9 refers to the antichrist also.
  
26. 20-21: The Christian has protection from false teaching. What is it? Where is it received? See 2 Corinthians 1:20-22
  
27. The Holy Trinity is indivisible – we never confuse the Persons or divide the Substance.” Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other cults teach that Jesus is not God. What does verse 23 say about it?
  
28. How is verse 24 related to verses 18-23?
  
29. In verse 26 St. John acts as Pastor. What is his duty as undershepherd of Christ? Recall 2:1.
  
30. In verse 27, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? See John 14:23-31. Compare our Lord’s Words there to what the same John writes in this verse of his First Epistle.

31. To what does John refer when he writes “when He appears”? What will happen at that time? What of those that teach falsehood? Read Matthew 3:11-12 (remember that John the Baptizer is NOT the author of the Gospel), Matthew 22:13, Matthew 24:50-51.
32. The Christian need not “worry” about the last day. Read verse 29. Compare with 1:6-7, 2:3. Review the relationship between faith and works. If necessary, use Ephesians 2:8-10.

**Read 1 John 3:1-10**

33. Verse 1 – Having sternly warned the Christians in the previous verses, here John lavishes the Gospel upon them. Again here John refers to the Christian as “children”, see 2:1, 13, 18, etc. Why is it that the world cannot “know” the Christian? What are some modern day examples of this?
34. Verses 2 and 3 point to the “reward of faith.” How is it that we will be “known”? (See Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, Philippians 2:10-11) The Christian is a child of God now. Why is it difficult to see this now? (See Matthew 13:24-30, 47-50)
35. Verse 2 speaks of the resurrection of the dead. How shall we “be like Him”? See 1 Corinthians 15:42-43, Philippians 3:17-21. How is Paul’s message in Philippians similar to that of John’s?
36. Verse 3 speaks of the “Blessed Exchange.” By faith in Christ, what is true of Christ is true of us in God’s eyes. See 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 3:22-24, Romans 4:25.

37. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ alone. But saving faith is never "alone." See Matthew 7:15-21, 16:24-27; Romans 2:4-10; James 2:14-26; Matthew 25:31-40. How do 1 John 3:3-4 help us understand the relationship between faith and works?

38. Verse 5: How does St. John describe the purpose of our Lord's incarnation? See Isaiah 53:11-12, John 1:29. How does St. John describe our Lord? See 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:12-16. How does this relate to Luke 1:34-35?

39. In light of 3:3-5, re-read 3:6-10.

**Read 1 John 3:11-15**

40. Verse 11: See John 13:34-35. One of the false teachings of the visible church today is that doctrine is opposed to love. Read John 8:31-47. Did Jesus love the Jews to whom He spoke? Read Acts 2:38-47. Here the love described by St. John, the love evident in early church, is clearly seen. Upon what is that love based?

41. Verse 12: See Hebrews 11:4. How does verse 13 relate to verse 12?

42. Verse 14: See 1 John 2:9-10.

43. Verse 15: See Matthew 5:21-26.

**Read 1 John 3:16-24**

44. Verse 16 – See John 15:11-23 – Compare the themes of this section of the First Epistle of St. John to the themes in John 15:11-23.

45. Verse 17-18 – See James 2:15-17. Review Ephesians 2:8-10 (question 32). See Philippians 2:12-13. What precedes this section of Philippians?
46. Verses 19-20 - See 2:1-2; Romans 14:22; Philippians 1:9-11; James 1:21-25.
47. Verses 21-22: See again Ephesians 2:8-10. Review the difference between Justification and Sanctification.
48. Verse 23 – To believe in God, and to love neighbor. What is this the summary of? See John 6:29, 13:34-5 (what church Feast takes its name from this verse?), Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:36-37.
49. Verse 24 – by the Spirit – see John 14:6; 1 John 2:1, and questions #14 & #15 above. See Romans 9:1; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5.

**Read 1 John 4:1-6**

50. Chapter 4, verse 1 – Here Holy Scripture directs you to judge – to test and approve or disapprove. See 1 Corinthians 11:17, Romans 16:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; Ephesians 4:1-6.
51. Verses 2-3 – St. John has already taught his readers about the antichrist, see 1 John 2:18, 2:22, and 2 John 1:7 (and above, question #25). The discernment John refers to in verse 1, and the false spirits he refers to in verse 2, are also identified in Ephesians 6:12. Notice that false doctrine is the work of the antichrist.
52. Verse 4 – St. John encourages his reader – God has already defeated Satan. See Genesis 3:15, John 19:30, Revelation 20:1-3.

53. In verses 3 and 4, John sets up opposites – on one hand is the world, on the other hand is ?
54. In verse 4, who is the one “who is in the world?” Hint: see verse 3. See Ephesians 2:1-2, John 1:9-10.
55. Verse 5: Those from the world speak a different “word.” See John 10:26-27. Where can God’s Word be found? Can you identify some contemporary ways in which the world speaks a different word than the children of God?
56. Verse 6: Compare this verse to the John 10:26-27 verse in question 55. Which Word is it that the Church speaks? Will the world listen? How does this relate to Luther’s explanation to the third article of the Creed? See 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.
57. Again in verse 6 the Scriptures tell us to judge/discern. What are we to discern? See Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 5:11, Galatians 2:11-13. What are the consequences of failing to discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of error? See John 1:17, 14:6.

**Read 1 John 4:7-12**

58. Verse 7: See again John 13:34-35. How can this be reconciled with 4:1-6? Is it loving to mark and avoid those who teach false doctrine? See John 8:42-45, Matthew 23:27, Joshua 8:24-26, John 2:14-15. Can these pericopes be reconciled with a loving God?
59. Verse 7: According to the concordance, the word “love” is used 43 times in the First Epistle of St. John, and 32 ties between verses 8 and 21. It is used 20 times in the Gospel of John. Read verses 8 and 9 together with verse 7. Now read verse 10. What is the source of our love? In verse 10 the word translated “propitiation” is related to the word for “Mercy Seat” in Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5. What does this tell you about God’s love?

60. Verses 8-9: What is the proper relationship between faith and works (love for God and love for neighbor)? Can a non-Christian truly love? On this side of heaven, can anyone love perfectly?
62. What does verse 8 say about God? Read Romans 5:1-8. God's love is not an ethereal, nebulous emotion. It is shown to us in a very specific way. What is the way that God's love is shown to us?
63. Verse 10: Can an unbeliever "make a decision for Jesus?" How does this verse relate to Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed?
64. Verse 11: We have already seen that the word translated "propitiation" derives from the Greek word for "Mercy Seat." In verse 10, "love" is defined. In verse 11, we see the response of faith to God's love for us. What is it?
65. Verse 12: God is Spirit. No one has ever seen God. See John 1:18. How does John 1:18 relate to the context? See Genesis 32:30; Exodus 3:13-14; Judges 6:22-23, 13:17-22; Isaiah 6:5. Now see John 8:58 and John 18:5-6. Which Person of the Holy Trinity dwells in us? See Joel 2:28-29; John 14:23-26, 20:22-23. Now see John 20:26-28. How did Thomas' confession relate to 1 John 4:12? Now read 1 John 4:13.

**Read 1 John 4:13-21**

66. It is commonly said, especially by Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, that the Trinity is an un-Biblical doctrine. Read 1 John 4:9-15. Is the doctrine of the Trinity clear?

67. Verse 15: Read 1 Corinthians 12:3. What is the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? By which Person do we “acknowledge” (the Greek word is ‘confess’) that Jesus is the Son of God?
68. Verse 16: How have we known, and how do we believe? What is the role of the Gospel? Can it be separated from the Trinity?
69. Again in verse 16 love is defined. What is love? Compare to verse 10. How is this related to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?
70. Verse 17: How is the indwelling of the Spirit related to judgement day? See Ephesians 1:11-15, 4:25. How does this indwelling occur? See Titus 3:5 and Revelation 7:9.
71. Verse 18: In light of verse 17, why is there no “fear in love”? The word translated “punishment” only occurs twice in the New Testament. The other is in Matthew 25:46. What is the context there?
72. What makes the one who does not fear perfect? Explain.
73. Verse 19: See verse 10.
74. Verse 20: How does this relate to 1:6, 1:8, and 2:1-2?
75. Where is this “command” given? See John 13:34.

**Read 1 John 5:1-12**

76. Verse 1 – What is the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? See John 6:29. What does it mean to be “born of God?” See John 3:5. According to 1 John 5:1, what is true of the one who is born of God? What relationship does John describe the believer having with God? How then are we to pray?
77. Verse 2 - What is the relationship between verses 1 and 2? What is the significance of the change from “child” to “children?” How does this relate to 4:21? Where are the children be found?
78. Verses 3, 4 – What is the relationship between loving God, obeying His commands, and overcoming the world? What does it mean to overcome the world?
79. Verse 5 – What role does faith have in overcoming the world?
80. Read verses 6-8. Compare the translation of this section with other versions of the English Bible. Pastor will explain. This section is known as the Johannine “comma”, among the most contested sections of Scripture.
81. What does it mean to say the Jesus came by water and blood? If the water is Jesus’ baptism, what is the blood? See John 19:34, Hebrews 9:19-20.
82. What is the significance of the testimony of three? See John 5:31-37
83. Does the inclusion or the exclusion of the Johannine comma change the doctrine of the Epistle?
84. Verse 9 - Where can we find this testimony today?
85. Verse 10 – Which testimony does the believer have in his heart?
86. Verse 10 is clear – either the Bible is true, or God is a liar. What does this mean for our doctrine and practice? What are some examples you can name?

87. Verses 11-12 – See John 3:14-18, John 20:31
88. How is it that we “have” Jesus? See Galatians 2:20-21, Romans 5:1, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Colossians 2:5-12, Hebrews 4:14, 2 John 1:9
89. What does the one who has the Son of God receive? See 3:14; 4:9-10 One commentator writes “John binds everything together. God’s testimony brings us His Son; eternal life is in His Son, is in Him for us; it is given us in and by this testimony; to believe it is to have the Son, and to have Him is to have this life...”

**Read 1 John 5:13-21**

89. Verse 13 – See Mark 16:17; John. 1:12; John 3:18; John 10:25; John. 20:31; 1 John 3:23.
90. Name – The Name of God is more than just a noun. It is described as “His essence”, “the sum of His attributes,” “an independent subject of Divine action,” and also that “the Word = the Name.” Note what these passages teach about God’s Name: 2 Chronicles 20:8; Ezra 6:12, Psalm 69:36, Psalm 124:8; Psalm 140:13; Isaiah 57:15; Jeremiah 23:6 (to whom does this refer?), Jeremiah. 33:16; Jeremiah 44:26; Ezekiel 43:7; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 13:6. Where in the liturgy do we refer to God’s Name? How does this confess what we mean by it?
91. Verses 14, 15 – What do we learn from this verse about prayer? How then should we pray? See Romans 8:26-27.

92. Verse 16 – God is the giver of all good things. What does verse 16 say about God’s giving? John just finished speaking of having life – what does the one who sins have?
  
93. Verses 16,17 “There is a sin that leads to death” – see Romans 1:24-25; Romans 6:23. In John, denying Christ (1:7, 2:22) and making God a liar (1:8, 10), saying that we have no sin, all lead to death. See especially Matthew 12:31, Exodus 23:20-21; Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:24-31. Roehrs/Franzmann reads “The blasphemy against the Spirit is the conscious, stubborn, malicious opposition to divine revelation which becomes unpardonable because it cuts off the possibility of repentance.” How does this relate to Romans 1&2?
  
94. The section that follows, 18-21, begins with the words “We know.” What does this mean? Who is “we?” What does it mean to “know?”
  
95. Verse 18 – Who is the one “born of God?” Where does this birth take place? (see John 3:3-5. How does verse 18 relate to Romans 7?
  
96. Verse 19 – How does Holy Scripture regard the “world?”
  
97. Verse 20 – Here St. John summarizes the previous verses – indeed summarizes the Epistle. Break verse 20 down into smaller sections, and discuss how the previous verses are summarized here.
  
98. Verse 21 – The Epistle ends with an admonition. How does this relate to the section that begins in verse 13? To the entire Epistle?